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The *Epistula Severi* provides an account of the conversion of the Jews on the island of Minorca in February 418. The letter was circulated and survived among documents associated with St. Stephen the Protomartyr. Although the author claims the saint's relics were instrumental in initiating the events he describes, the letter is not hagiographical. In fact, the relics play a surprisingly small role in the story - interpretation of the letter had confounded scholars because of concerns of authenticity and historicity. The issue of authenticity has effectively been resolved through Bradbury's research on the letter.[1] Scholars now are beginning rightly to move away from concerns about the historicity of the conversion of Jews on the island and instead explore what the letter can reveal about identity, religion, and gender in Late Antiquity. This, in turn, has allowed scholars to focus on the text as something besides a historical letter. Regarding historical fiction in antiquity, Perry notes:

> Here we must repeat that throughout the formal prose literature of antiquity, exclusive of the romance and the traditionally comic or mimic genres, what we call fiction or story is conceived either as history or as the recording of presumably actual occurrences. In this fashionable environment, moreover, from the standpoint of dramatic development, a

1 Bradbury (1996).

> story is always depressed by being subordinated to something else, either to the larger framework of a history, within which it is only one incident, or to a philosophical idea which it serves to illustrate. [2]

In this light, the letter should be considered a historical, fictional narrative. That is not to say that the letter is untrue but rather that it contains narrative elements that can be studied through rhetorical means. The story it tells is influenced in its telling by the motives of the author and thus reflects his philosophical beliefs and ideological goals. Thus, I will employ rhetorical narrative criticism to examine the discourse of the letter's narrative. Through this analysis, I will show that the *Epistula Severi* is an early example of anti-Jewish propaganda that reflects the embrace of violence as a means of conversion. I will also examine how it promotes a totalizing discourse for an imperial, Christian identity that seeks to erase Jewish history from its past.

Severus' narrative is told in the form of a letter. The epistolary form becomes a frame to contain the narrative. This means that the audience reading the narrative has basic expectations of form from the beginning. For instance, one expects a salutation, introduction, exposition, closure, and valediction. Indeed, all of these things are found in the letter. The choice of epistolary form sends a message to the reader about what to expect but does not dictate the contents of the narrative. At the same time, it does not reflect the veracity of the material contained within the letter. If this letter had been from the perspective of Theodorus, for example, the description of events and the way in which they were reported most likely would have been quite different. Likewise, had it been written to a Jewish audience, it would have had a different purpose and thus not related the events in the same way.

The focus on purpose is an important part of understanding the plot of the narrative. The events are not a collected list of random occurrences. Rather, the author has carefully arranged them in a progression from beginning to end to achieve his desired goal. "The rhetorical approach conceives of narrative as a purposive communicative act. In this view, narrative is not just a representation of events but is also itself an event – one in which someone is doing something with a representation of events."[3] The implied author makes use of form, content, and order in telling his narrative. "Texts are designed by authors in order to affect readers in particular ways; those designs are conveyed through the words, techniques, structures, forms, and

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2 Perry (1967, p. 70).

3 Phelan in Herman (2007, p. 203).

intertextual relations of texts."[4] Examining the way the plot is constructed, then, can reveal the discourse of the narration.

Severus, the implied author, had a message to deliver. He chose to deliver the message in the form of a letter which contains a story. However, this is an artifice. The author attempts to make his story feasible by the construction of the Severus character, using him as the narrator. The narrator, Severus, relates a personal account of events to an imaginary narratee, the recipient of the letter. This is the story aspect of the narration. Through this artifice, the implied author speaks indirectly to an implied audience. This is the discourse aspect of the narration. I will examine what the implied narrator tells us, what he does not, and the manner in which he brings together events to compel the implied audience to accept his story and thus his discourse. As Herman says, "Here is another important point about narrative. It at one and the same time fills and creates gaps. This is an insight that first received extended development by Wolfgang Iser and Meir Sternberg in the 1970s. As Iser wrote, 'it is only through the inevitable omissions that a story gains its dynamism.'"[5] Severus creates a number of dramatic gaps where he leaves out major events (like the burning of the synagogue). He also includes dreams, miracles, and information that have come to him only through external sources, and he recounts them not necessarily in the chronological order in which they occurred. Thus, his narrative plot (i.e. story as discoursed[6]) is intentionally arranged to influence the reader to believe him and accept his point of view.

The salutation at the start of the letter opens the narrative frame for the rest of the text. From the beginning, it delivers a message through its form and choice of words. It marks the creation of the implied author as a distinct character and imbues him with certain characteristics.

> The beginning of a text is governed by the modelling of causality, whereas the end stresses goals,[7] and this would seem to be a valuable way of linking plot structure to the "edge" of the text, the point at which the text passes into, and is closed off from, nonaesthetic space. The beginning of a text, finally, is the point at which the distancing between author and narrator usually occurs…[8]

4 Phelan in Herman (2007, p. 209).

5 Abbott in Herman (2007, p. 44).

6 Chatman as quoted in Powell (1990, p. 23).

7 Lotman as referenced in a footnote in Frow (2002, p. 334).

8 Frow (2002, p. 334).

As a frame, it creates a literary picture of both an artificial narrator, Severus, and an artificial narratee, the recipient of the letter, which, in turn, is meant to convey information from Severus to an audience. It also creates the expectation of an ending that will explain the contents of the letter in some way and, possibly, ask for something in return. That expectation is fulfilled by the end. In this sense, the beginning and the end of the letter are the most important parts. As the framing structure, they are the parts most likely to be remembered by the reader. The beginning must be dynamic and interesting enough to capture the attention of the audience and indicate what the implied author wants the audience to think. The ending must be satisfying and compelling enough to convince the audience to accept the author's point of view. Everything in between is the author's opportunity to influence the audience to arrive at the point of view he desires them to have. There is a natural flow between the textual elements of the story and the readerly dynamics in reaction to them. "A narrative's movement from its beginning to its end is governed by both a textual and a readerly dynamics, and understanding their interaction provides a good means for recognizing a narrative's purposes."[9] Thus the narrative progression from beginning to middle to end is a crucial element in understanding the discourse of the letter.

In studying the character of Severus, the narrator, we see the way the implied author established at the start a mindset of binary opposition between Christians and Jews. This was the point in the narration which showed separation between the flesh-and-blood author, the implied author, and the character narrator. The salutation and the introduction of the Severus character form the exposition at the opening of the narrative.

> Elements of exposition matter because they influence our understanding of the narrative world, which in turn influences our understanding of the meaning and consequences of the action, including our initial generic identifications of the narrative and the expectations that follow from that identification.[10]

The implied author creates a world that is specific to his discourse. The authorial audience is invited to become part of that world as a means of accepting the discourse. If the audience rejects the world that is established by the implied author, there can be no forward movement in the narrative. The reader will stop reading or consciously choose to reject the discourse. Severus makes direct appeals to his audience to

9 Phelan (2005, p. 210).

10 Phelan (2007, p. 16).

accept the world he creates by referencing, for example, the selection from Tobit and claiming that it would be wrong to conceal the miracles of God (1.1-2). This creates a suspenseful intrigue that heightens the curiosity of the reader to find out what he means. At the same time, it tells us something about the ideal, narrative audience for whom Severus was writing. For one, he fully expects his audience to have familiarity with Tobit and other biblical references. He also assumes that his audience will be Christian and sympathetic to his story. His discourse, then, will involve the way he convinces his audience of something more than just being sympathetic. It is necessary to study the entire plot or narrative progression in order to see what that is and how he does it.

The story begins with the description of the island. It is a logical beginning for anyone who is not familiar with Minorca. It also serves the dual purpose of providing a geographical setting for the story and a philosophical one for the discourse. The establishment of the binary opposition at the beginning of the letter is essential for everything that follows. The storyline is dependent on the oppositional nature of the relationship between the Jews and Christians, and the discourse which continues to unfold is based on the concept of the two groups being at odds. The geography of the island actually is not described in much detail. The landscape of conflict is more important than the real life terrain. The same is true of the social relationships which are detailed in the beginning exposition. The narration creates a picture of conflict brewing just below the surface in any engagement of Christians and Jews. But gaps remain in the descriptions that cause us to wonder about the reality of the situation. For example, are there only Christians and Jews on the island? Where are the pagans? How did Jews get to be in such prominent political and social positions in the government in Magona if there is such dislike for them among the Christians? No explanation for these gaps is given in the story. Rather, the narrative quickly slides beyond them and moves toward the conflict which arises after the arrival of the saint's relics. It is an effective technique as the reader gets caught up in the more pressing issue of the building trouble and the issues of realism (mimetic plausibility) are forgotten. This is a general pattern that marks the progression of the textual elements in the narrative.

> On the textual side narratives proceed by the introduction, complication, and resolution (in whole or in part) of two kinds of unstable situations. The first kind exists on the level of story, that is, the events and existents, including character and setting, of narrative, and I call them simply *instabilities*: they involve relations within, between, or among characters

> and their situations. ... The second kind exists at the level of discourse, that is, the narration and its techniques, and I call them *tensions*: they involve relations among authors, narrators, and audiences, and they include gaps between tellers and audiences of knowledge, beliefs, opinions, and values.[11]

The instability presented at the beginning is the relationship between the Christians and the Jews. This is supported by the setting which creates binary opposition. In turn, this creates a tension between reality and the world of the *Epistula Severi*. However, the tension is lessened if the audience is willing to accept the reality which Severus creates. The letter progresses through movements of instabilities among the characters and tensions as the reader is drawn into the authorial audience.

The initial depiction of life on the island is one of disquiet. This does not mean that life was actually like that in the real world. Certain contradictions in the text lead the reader to believe that there was less ill will between Christians and Jews than overtly stated (e.g. the reference to social interactions like greetings and even the mention of affection among the two peoples).[12] But Severus describes a society in which the status quo is less peaceful or stable and resentment lurks below the surface. The first disrupting instability to come to the island then is the arrival of St. Stephen's relics… or, rather, the appointment of Severus as bishop.[13] The arrival of the relics is introduced with the seemingly offhand comment that they came "nearly on the same day on which I, although unworthy, acquired the title of such priesthood."[14] This is the first actual event in the story and the narrator signals right away that he will be substituting one thing for another in his recounting. Although he makes the case that St. Stephen was the inspiration for the events that unfolded, he also makes it clear indirectly that everything started with his own arrival. As if to remove any doubt about the swiftness of his actions, he repeatedly employs fire imagery[15] to describe the reaction among the Christians.

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11 Phelan (2005, p. 212).

12 Some modern scholars (e.g. Bradbury, 1996) have argued that these are clear indications of peaceful coexistence between Christians and Jews.

13 Most scholars accept Severus' claim that the relics are the cause of the conflict against the Jews because they inspired such a strong reaction in the Christians. I am not saying they did not. Rather, rhetorically in the *Letter*, Severus uses them as an excuse to stir up violence against the Jews. The mention of these two events as connected shows that he wants them connected in the reader's mind.

14 *diebus paene isdem, quibus ego tanti sacerdotii nomen, licet indignus, adeptus sum* (4.1).

15 Gaddis discusses the common use of fire imagery in religious zeal, especially as it relates to violence. "Fire imagery was often used to describe the Holy Spirit, Mary's conception, and the presence

> Quo facto, protinus ille, quem Dominus 'venit mittere in terram' et quem valde ardere[16] cupit, caritatis eius ignis accensus est. Statim siquidem tepor noster incaluit et factum est cor nostrum, sicut scriptum est, 'ardens in via'. Nunc enim iam illud fidei amburebat zelus, nunc spes salvandae multitudinis erigebat. (4.3)
>
> When this was done, immediately that fire of his love ignited, which the Lord 'came to scatter onto the earth' and which he wants to burn brightly. Indeed at once our warmth grew hot and our hearts became, as it is written, 'burning on the path.' For now that zeal of our faith was burning, now the hope of saving the crowd was exciting us.

This fiery beginning to the story catches the attention of the audience. It also sets the tone for the rest of the conflict between the two parties as it shows the Christians to be inspired by holy passion to serve the church and bring salvation to the disbelieving Jews. Their motivation is thus pure and even supported by scripture as shown by the two allusions to Luke.[17]

Yet, as soon as the conflict begins it is interrupted, building suspense. Theodorus is presented as the typical villain of the story, powerful and corrupt. He is a noble, influential man on whom the Jews and even some Christians depended. Tapping into the binary opposition of Christians and Jews presented earlier in the introduction, Theodorus becomes the symbolic opposite of Severus. His power, and that of the Jews, is earthly.[18] The Christians, on the other hand, are shown to be physically weaker but humble in their hearts and stronger in truth.[19] Therefore the Jews put their trust in Theodorus but the Christians put theirs in the saint. This, of course, is another ruse on Severus' part. The Jews look to their patron, Theodorus,

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of Christ within the Eucharist. Great zeal for the faith was commonly represented as 'fire' within the heart. It is in this context that we must understand the many stories of fire miracles by which holy men, Syrian as well as others, demonstrated their power or legitimated acts of righteous violence." (2005, pp. 185-186). In this case, the fire of zeal foreshadows the fire which will destroy the synagogue later in the text.

16 It is significant that although he claims the Christians acted through peace and desire to help the Jews, the imagery he uses is often destructive. Here he talks about fire and burning which foreshadows the ultimate destruction of the synagogue later in the *Letter*.

17 Bradbury cites the two quotations as coming from *Luke* 12:49 and 24:32 respectively (1996, p. 83).

18 *et censu et honore saeculi praecipuus erat* (6.1).

19 *corde ita etiam et viribus humiles sed veritatis robore superiores* (6.4).

for protection and he provides it by calming the disputes between the two groups. But the flame of faith[20] reignites. It does not happen in Magona, however, where the relics are kept but rather in Jamona where Severus resides. This is the most obvious example of the author concealing the events behind the symbolism of religion. Of course, the narrator may well believe that St. Stephen was responsible for what happened. Certainly he wants his narratees to believe that it is true. But the underlying discourse reveals to us that in fact the bishop was the catalyst for the renewed zeal to move against the Jews.

The story continues with a description of the preparations for the confrontation. The Christians put their faith in Christ. While suspense builds the narrative in other situations, it is excluded when referring to the eventual outcome of the conflict. Simply stated, the Christians win despite the minimal odds. What is remarkable is that they do so with little effort because of the support of Christ.[21] The author does not want the reader to wonder about the outcome and so he reveals it from the start. This frees the reader to focus instead on how the outcome was achieved which is really the discourse he promotes.

Meanwhile, the Jews look not to their future but to their past as they prepare. They remind themselves of the Maccabees and tell one another they prefer death to losing their heritage.[22] Therefore they stockpile all manner of weapons to defend themselves. No weapons are mentioned in regard to the Christians. Instead, they merely had the protection of the Holy Spirit.[23] It is thus difficult to cast blame on them since they are weaponless. The Christians seem to win this war despite their own inaction. We know from the minimal details about the resulting destruction that this is not true, but Severus makes a concerted effort to portray the Christians as innocent of any aggression in the unfolding events.

The forward movement of the story is again interrupted at this point to relate the dreams of Theodora and Theodorus. In some ways, the dreams act as a break in the action to allow for reflection on what has happened while the author more actively promotes the discourse. In this instance, we are reintroduced to Theodorus who has not taken a leading role in the story so far. His only contribution has been

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20 *fidei flamma* (7.2).

21 *absque ullo sudore certaminis exercitui suo hanc quam nemo aut optare audebat aut sperare poterat victoriam concessisse* (8.3).

22 *Iudaei igitur exemplis se Machabaei temporis cohortantes, mortem quoque pro defendendis legitimis suis desiderabant*. (8.4).

23 *virtute Sancti Spiritus praemunitam* (8.5).

the brief respite in the conflict which he provided to the inhabitants of Magona by his return from Majorca. The dream sequence serves both to round out his character and to foreshadow what will happen to him later. The Theodorus in the dream is not as self-confident and authoritative as in his first description. He is moved by fear of the Lion and flees in panic. This, as well as his encounter with Reuben and the solace he seeks from the female relative, foreshadow where the story will go. Importantly, though, it also develops the discourse by adding a new element. In the dreams, Theodorus and the Jews (in the guise of a widow) offer themselves to the Christians. This is significant because it shows willingness rather than coercion. While we can, and should, read between the lines that coercion was in fact the method to get the Jews to convert, the reader is shown how to promote a different portrayal of events. The goal is not only to convert the Jews but to make the conversion look like it was their idea.

An unspecified period of preparations for the "future war"[24] allows both groups, significantly described as "armies"[25] to be forewarned by countless dreams, of which the above mentioned are the only two reported. Recounting dreams takes the place of relating what actually went on in the Christian city. When the story resumes, the Christians are prepared and set out eagerly to confront the Jews in Magona. Crossing the island is dispatched in one sentence reflecting the eagerness of the Christians to enjoin their opponents. And then the conflicts begin.

From his arrival in Magona, Severus is hostile to the Jews. He demands that they meet with him and dismisses their refusals with more demands. He insists that his intention is to carry out peaceful discussion with them[26] but his tone is condescending and he insults the Jews by insinuating that they might be using an excuse when they were really planning some kind of trick.[27] The verbal sparring between the two parties ends when the Jews are forced to physically meet with Severus. Curiously, Theodorus is absent from all of these activities. In fact, it is unclear with which Jews Severus corresponded or who was forced to show up at his house. Those details are simply lacking. The Lion of God is named as the agent compelling the

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24 *futurum instruitur bellum* (9.1).

25 *utrique exercitus* (9.1). Again, the word choice is important here. The notion of war and armies stands out in this supposedly peaceful plan especially since Severus claims that the Jews were stockpiling weapons, but the Christians had none.

26 *futurum autem esse modestissimum de lege conflictum, nec excitandas lites sed fabulas esse miscendas* (12.6).

27 *si non astute certamen fugerent sed simplicem afferent excusationem* (12.6).

Jews to come. This convenient symbol covers any indication of wrong doing or possible violent action. The Jews are described as terrified by the Lion[28] but we don't know what occurred to cause that reaction. The reader is left with a gap in the story that can be filled or not, and individual readers may insert different images as they imagine them. The not-telling creates a more powerful story because of the potential variation in how readers react. The discourse is also supported because the violence that was likely employed is never mentioned. It becomes clear that Severus wants an excuse to lead his band to the synagogue and he refuses to accept any argument from the Jews until they allow him to do so.

Going to the synagogue, the elated Christians begin singing songs to Christ.[29] The Jews are likewise moved to sing and join the Christians in singing the same song.[30] Bradbury[31] suggests that this is evidence of close ties between the Christians and the Jews, contrary to Severus' earlier claim that the appearance of friendship between the two peoples was out of obligation only. Whether that is true or not, Severus includes that detail for a reason. He even includes the words of the song they were singing: *Periit memoria eorum cum strepitu et Dominus in aeternum permanet*.[32] These lines are pertinent for other reasons. First, they foreshadow what will happen to the Jews by the end of the letter: they will cease to be Jews and instead continue with the Christians. Second, they indicate again that the Jews willingly participate in this destruction of their past identity because they choose to join in the singing with the Christians. And third, it hints at the broader discourse of Christian reclamation of Jewish identity which was unfolding in this time and which Severus reasserts more forcefully later in the letter. It is their memory (i.e. their past) which perishes when they become Christians.

Jewish women throwing rocks from the rooftops and high windows interrupt the journey to the synagogue. This incites a miraculous riot in which no one is hurt. By this point in the letter it is clear that every event serves a purpose of discourse rather than reflecting any realistic picture of what happened. More time is spent describing the motives of the mob and God's intentions than what actually must

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28 *illius leonis terrore compulsi* (12.7).

29 *hymnum Christo per plateam ex multitudine laetitiae canebamus* (13.1).

30 *mira iucunditate etiam Iudaeorum populus decantabat* (13.2).

31 Bradbury (1996, p. 128, note 14).

32 "Their memory dies with an uproar and the Lord continues forever." (13.2).

have transpired. The destruction of the synagogue is mentioned almost as an afterthought. The focus instead is on the actions brought about by divine will (e.g. it was God's plan that the women throw the rocks; the Lion incited the Christians to attack; etc.). Recognition of divine accomplishments and praise of God are typical elements in Christian literature. Severus demonstrates how this can be used to support his other purpose, the appearance of Christian innocence in situations of anti-Jewish violence. He does not claim that the synagogue was not destroyed. He also does not fail to mention that it happened. It is important both to acknowledge the fact that violence happened and to dissimulate effectively the agency of the Christians in any wrongdoing. Divine support and pureness of intention are appropriate filters for such a discourse. With the synagogue destroyed, the Christians leave the scene singing again and turn their attention to the next phase of their campaign.

After a break of three days the narrative resumes. Just before, there is a short interlude inserted, however, describing the conversion of Reuben. He is the first to convert on the island. It is both sudden and dramatic. "For delighting the hearts of everyone with a very holy cry, he begged to be released from the chains of Jewish superstition."[33] This partially clarifies Theodorus' unexplained dream that happened earlier. More significantly, it shows the first convert, seemingly of his own accord, asking to be made a Christian. There is no indication of coercion. The identification of Reuben with the first born son of Jacob lends an authoritative element to the act, however, because it confirms Severus' earlier statement that God named this man appropriately and intentionally. Therefore, it was God's will that this should transpire. And, in some sense, it rewrites an element of Jewish history in a new Christian setting that includes Jews becoming Christians rather than Christians distancing themselves from Jews.

Theodorus makes his entrance as an active character in the next segment of the story. This is the epic fight scene: like two warriors surrounded by their supporters, Theodorus and Severus face off against one another. They clash with words, however, and in the battle, Theodorus is superior. But the Christians are not vanquished. Severus had predicted this outcome long before when he compared the Jews and the Christians preparing to fight.

> Christum vero cuius 'regnum non in sermone sed in virtute est' nobis ne verbum quidem proferentibus, suis omnia viribus consummasse, et absque

33 *Nam clamore sanctissimo laetificans corda cunctorum, absolvi se a vinculis Iudaicae superstitionis deprecabatur*. (15.2).

> ullo sudore certaminis exercitui suo hanc quam nemo aut optare audebat aut sperare poterat victoriam concessisse. (8.3)
>
> But Christ, whose 'kingdom is not in word but in virtue' accomplished everything by his own force without us even saying a word, and he granted his army without any sweat of struggle a victory which no one dared to hope for or was able to expect.

In fulfilment of that prophecy, the miracle occurs which leads to Christian victory and Jewish demise. The misunderstanding of the shout for Theodorus to believe leads to a general panic among the Jews and leaves Theodorus alone and vulnerable. Or, at least, that is what Severus wants his audience to believe. As with the other riot, most of the details are missing or symbolically portrayed. "That terrible Lion" appears once again and instills fear in the Jews. Theodorus' dream continues to be realized next when it is revealed that he is standing on the exact spot about which he had dreamed. The singing monks are depicted again and Reuben shows up. We have no understanding of what else happened during the show-down. We know that many Jews fled in fear for their safety, some even leaving the city for the protection of the wilderness. The cause of their fear, which must have been grand, is not discussed. However, it is once again implied and certainly evident from the reaction of the Jews.

The interaction with Reuben provides another opportunity for Severus to shape the discourse by adding something new to it. From the beginning, he has slowly unrolled his agenda. First, he created the sense of binary opposition. This was followed by the suggestion that the Jews volunteer to convert rather than be coerced. He then added the notion that this was all part of God's plan. Reuben is responsible for a new element in the formula. He makes an offer of continued prestige and safety for Theodorus if he converts. This is an obvious example of coercion: the implication is that failure to convert will result in a loss of prestige and possible harm. However, it is also a form of negotiation that was not present before. Theodorus obviously perceives it to be such because he accepts but makes a counter offer – give him a little time to make his announcement public so he can gain more prestige by convincing others to convert with him.[34] This is a completely unexpected answer from Theodorus. He is the leader of the Jewish people and responsible for their well-be-

34 *permittite mihi ut prius alloquar plebem meam, ut maiorem conversionis meae etiam ex reliquis possim habere mercedem*. (16.16).

ing. His motivation is unclear for making this offer. Is he concerned about his own position and power? Is he willing to sell out his own people for personal gain? Or is he so terrified for his people that he thinks he only can save them by making them convert? Generally speaking, Severus provides the reader with ambiguities when he is trying to communicate something else. When we examine the context of this startling exchange, it starts to make more sense. The previous scene had just shown what happened when the Jews thought their leader had converted. The description of the panic was detailed with women screaming and tearing out their hair and men running for their lives. Theodorus would want that not to happen if he converted. But Severus also would want that not to happen. His dilemma is how to convert the Jews without making it seem like a forced or violent affair. Here, he has suggested a new strategy: bribe the leadership and get them to assist. With Theodorus working from the inside, the chance of the Jews offering themselves for conversion is more likely. And indeed, immediately after this, large crowds of Jews assembled at the church and asked to be converted.[35]

The episode which follows, involving Meletius and Innocentius hiding in the cave, is one of the longest in the letter. There is little forward progression in the narrative (no indication of what is happening in the city while they are gone is provided) in this segment as it almost completely takes place in a cave and ends with the two characters returning to the city from which they just had left. It is a curious episode because it shows Innocentius trying to convince Meletius that they should convert. Placed after the short passage in which Theodorus made a strikingly rapid decision to convert and just before the public meeting in which he tries to convince the other Jews to convert with him, this scene takes on a new meaning. It shows the psychological and philosophical argument that Severus wants us to imagine the Jews had in deciding to convert. The notion that the whole population would suddenly convert is unrealistic without at least some internal struggle. This passage provides that. It is unlike any other passage because it represents two sides of the argument for converting. Meletius holds out and tries to resist while Innocentius provides reasons why they should become Christian. However, his arguments sound suspiciously like Severus' discourse. When Meletius complains he cannot drive out the phrase "Christ, in your name"[36] from his mind, Innocentius replies:

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35 *Iudaeorum multitudinem convenisse inspeximus, qui omnes unanimiter deprecabantur ut Christi characterem a me, licet indigno pastore, susciperent*. (17.1-2).

36 *Christe, in nomine tuo* (18.6).

> 'Non', inquit, 'frustra hic sermo, quem neque cor tuum, ut apud cunctos probatissimum est, antea cogitavit neque os umquam protulit, hoc praesertim tempore menti tuae, ut asseris, tam violenter insertus est . Ex Deo hoc esse arbitror. (18.7)
>
> It is not in vain that this phrase, which neither your heart (which is very well proven among everyone) has ever thought nor your mouth ever produced, has been so violently inserted, as your claim, into your mind especially at this time. I believe it is from God.

The conversion is God's will, according to Innocentius. Those do not seem like the words of a Jew who just fled from the city in fear. However, Innocentius encourages Meletius to struggle harder against the thoughts. When this does not prove to be enough, he tells him that he heard the Christians exclaim that Theodorus had converted and wondered if it were not likely that Meletius too would soon convert just as his relative did.[37] Based on that supposition he concludes that it is useless for them to remain in the cave and risk the dangers of starvation; they should return to the city. His suggestion that the conversion of Theodorus indicates that it is inevitable that the others will convert is spurious at best and the idea that they should return to Magona for safety is out of place with their flight from there in the first place. His further description of the Christians as "such a merciful people,"[38] "blameless,"[39] and "not at all enemies"[40] are thoughts that Severus wants his implied audience to have, not what someone who just fled for his life from the city would have said. As unbelievable as these words are to us, they are equally inconceivable to Meletius who rejects them outright and urges voluntary exile before apostasy. And so the two set out to escape again. At this point God intervenes and nature itself rises against them, driving them back toward the city until they eventually, as Innocentius had foreseen, abandon their plan for escape and accept that conversion is their only option. It is worth noting that they did so "against their will and plan."[41] When reasoning failed, forced coercion was a valid alternative.

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37 *Poteritne fieri ut non etiam tu germani constrictus exemplo religionem Iudaicam deseras?* (18.13).

38 *plebs tam misericors* (18.14).

39 *innoxios* (18.14).

40 *in nullo sensimus inimicos* (18.14).

41 *contra voluntatem ac propositum suum* (18.23).

Three days after these events, Theodorus completes whatever requirements are needed to address his people and bring them together "to call them to faith in Christ."[42] By the end of this episode many Jews in fact rushed to become Christians.[43] However it is not because Theodorus convinced them. Instead, before he could address the crowd, two others, a young relative of Theodorus named Galilaeus and another civic leader, Caecilianus, interrupt him. They relate powerful anecdotes about how they feared for their lives and could not continue to be Jews for fear of being injured or even murdered.[44] This is the most overt reference to violence and forced conversion in the letter. Notably it is expressed by the Jews and not the Christians. If the audience has been won over to Severus' argument by now, they will see that Jewish perception as shown here is not in keeping with the Christian behavior that Severus has been describing all along. Still, it is a strange episode to include as it has the potential to dilute or contradict the message that has been so actively promoted thus far. One possible reason for including it is to draw the attention away from Theodorus. There is a strong possibility that Theodorus could end up looking like the hero in this tale if he is the agent responsible for winning over all of the Jews. Such an ending would clearly undermine the whole message of this letter because it would show Theodorus as the charismatic leader who repents from his evil ways and leads his people out of darkness into the light. Severus, while not particularly trying to promote himself overtly as the savior here, really aims toward a discourse on how to convert the Jews. To reduce this conversion to one Jewish leader would make the letter a worthless message in the long run. Instead, by introducing these two characters who have never shown up before and allowing them to steal the glory from Theodorus, he removes the attention for a single individual. After this episode the audience sees that it takes multiple leaders to convert the whole group. There is also a strong reminder that force or threats of violence have an appropriate and useful role in the process. Theodorus had been frightened into becoming Christian earlier and now Caecilianus, who was also a "father of the Jews,"[45] expressed his own fear of being harmed as a reason to convert. Theodorus has been rendered irrelevant despite his role in converting the other Jews while Severus has re-emphasized the basic principles of his discourse.

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42 *ad fidem Christi provocare* (19.1).

43 *multosque Iudaeorum eadem die ad fidem Christi…suscepimus*. (19.10).

44 *si in Iudaismo perseverare voluero, forsitan perimendus sum.* (19.4).

45 *Caecilianus autem cum esset Iudaeorum pater* (19.2).

Having accomplished a major goal in the narrative, the forward progression is again interrupted with the recounting of prodigies. As usual, the interruption develops the discourse in a new way. The letter is getting close to its completion and so the discourse needs to be solidified for the audience. The joint miracles, told in reverse order chronologically, provide the final expansion of the discourse along two planes. First, they show that conversion of the Jews is not, in and of itself, the last stage. Rather, Judaism itself must be converted. The letter thus provides a model for re-claiming Jewish history and therefore Jewish identity as Christian. The Exodus from Egypt does not end with the arrival in the Promised Land. It ends with the arrival via conversion in Christianity. Therefore, Judaism is not itself complete until it makes the rest of the journey as well. The second idea is that conversion is God's will and must be diligently pursued throughout the whole world. The remote island of Minorca is chosen as an example for other places to follow. If such miraculous conversions could happen there, then it must be God's design they should be accomplished everywhere. This is both a broad and obvious message as the conclusion to the prodigies. But it should not be understated that the miracles show this letter is not simply an account of what happened on Minorca but rather a call to action for others to go out and employ the same techniques to convert the Jews.

Theodorus finally converts on the next day. He first needs to be reminded by everyone that he had promised.[46] He is hesitant to make a formal declaration because he has not spoken with his wife since she is still on Majorca. His two concerns are that she would not also convert and that she would choose to leave the marriage (21.2). The Christians are understanding of his concerns and willing to accommodate them[47] but the Jews who have already converted became upset and protest his delay. We don't know what ultimately drives him to convert but Theodorus cuts short his delay and converts, thus fulfilling the last part of his dream by "hurrying to his female relative's bosom."[48] That is the moment when the floodgates open and the mass conversion occurs.

> post quem omnis, tamquam remoto obice, ad ecclesiam synagoga confluxit. Mirum dictu, inveterati illi legis doctores sine ulla altercatione verborum, sine ullo scripturarum certamine crediderunt. Tantum

46 *summa omnium expectatio Theodorum ut sponsioni suae satisfaceret admonebat* (21.1).

47 *Cum haec Theodorus Christianis iam acquiescentibus perorasset, Iudaeis qui conversi fuerant acerrima commotione consistentibus* (21.3).

48 *ad matris propinquae sinum festinus* (21.3).

percunctati an vellent fidem Christi suscipere, credere se in Christum et Christianos statim fieri cupere profitebantur. (21.4-6)

> After him the whole synagogue, just like when an obstacle has been removed, poured toward the church. Wondrous to say, those elderly teachers of the law, without any argument over words, without and fight about scripture, believed. Having doubted so much about whether they were willing to accept Christ's faith, they professed that they believed in Christ and that they were desiring to become Christians immediately.

In a curious turn of events, Theodorus turns out to have been the obstacle blocking the Jews from converting all along. While obviously not the case, the imagery makes it look that way. Once Theodorus has finally confirmed his promised conversion, everyone else willingly joins, in accordance with Severus' wishes and the letter's discourse.

The letter moves toward a conclusion after the conversion of Theodorus and the majority of the Jews. The next sections all involve final converts. Some are quick and nameless, but a few still attempt to resist for a short while before they too convert. In the former category is an old man who decides to convert before he dies (22) and some nameless Jews who, while sailing past the island, are forced ashore by storms and decide to convert while there (23). In fact, Severus almost jokingly mentions a brief miracle in which there are repeated rainstorms (25). Every time it rains, another group of Jews converts. In the latter category, those who resist conversion, include only women. Specifically, the women are Artemisia (Meletius' wife) with her female friends and servants, the unnamed wife of Innocentius, and her sister. Kraemer gives an excellent feminist reading of the role and treatment of these (and other) female figures in the text[49] which I will not try to reproduce. From a rhetorical perspective, these figures also have significance collectively and individually. The fact that only the wives and women resist was predicted several times in the concerns expressed by Theodorus. One of the reasons he delays the public announcement of his own conversion is that he was afraid his wife would fail to convert or leave him if he did not discuss it with her first. The actions of Meletius' and Innocentius' wives show that his concern is valid. Also, in terms of closure to the letter, it is appropriate that these women be the last to convert since Meletius and Innocentius are, after Reuben, the first named characters to convert. Their conversion at the end completes the picture,

49 Kraemer (2009).

symbolically marking the success of Severus' mission.

Each of the (groups of) women also has a rhetorical purpose in the letter, reinforcing the discourse one last time before the valediction. When Severus states that there are three who have not yet become Christian, he comments that such is the will of God for the purpose of spreading His glory further.[50] Their individual purposes are revealed in the recounting of the subsequent passages. The miracle story involving Artemisia shows the re-writing of Jewish history in a Christian context and voluntary conversion. Innocentius' wife reasserts the power of prayer as a means of dissimilating forced conversion. The story about her sister uses biblical support to express the pre-destined outcome that the Jews will convert (i.e. that it is God's will).

Innocentius' wife resists conversion for four days. She is unable to be persuaded by her husband through threats or prayers or tears.[51] And so a whole crowd of Christians lay siege to her home.[52] It should not go unnoticed that Severus claims they came because Innocentius asked them to do so. When they arrive, they try to force her to convert with words but she is still not willing.

> Cum igitur diu cassa verba surdis auribus ingerentes nihil profecissemus, ad cognitum orationis praesidium convolavimus precesque, quas humana repellebat impietas, ad caelestem misericordiam vertimus. (27.4)
>
> Therefore when we had produced nothing forcing pointless words on deaf ears for a long time, we rushed to the known protection of prayer, and we turned prayers which human impiety rejected to heavenly mercy.

It is noteworthy that they "are forcing" (*ingerentes*) the words on her for a long time. The sense of coercion is strong. Her continued resistance and the subsequent assistance sought in prayer is a familiar formula in the letter at this point. The graphic image of the Christian army sweating[53] in its effort to convert this one woman is almost comical in its hyperbole. The same must be said about the comparison be-

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50 *ad virtutis suae gloriam dilatandam in duritia perfidiae suae Christus permanere aliquantulum passus est* (24.1).

51 *vel minis vel precibus vel lacrimis moveri posset* (27.2).

52 *universa Innocentio rogante ad domum in qua habitabat fraternitatis multitudo convenit* (27.3).

53 *nostri sudavit exercitus* (27.5).

tween her and Amalek.[54] However, for all its absurdity, this pattern again draws an allusion to Exodus[55] and reiterates the familiar pattern of reclaiming Jewish history in a new Christian context. And, in fact, after a lot of praying and crying, she at last agrees to convert:[56] "And when the people shout 'Amen' at the end of the prayer, she adds that she believes and wants to become a Christian".[57] In the end, the decision is hers and she willingly converts. But the emphasis in the passage is on the immense effort the Christians make to convince her. They occupy her house and remain there for hours persuading her, praying and singing. We have seen before, however, that violent things sometimes occur while the Christians are praying (e.g. the burning of the synagogue; the terror inspired in the Jews after the debate; etc.) in the letter.[58] Even if she agrees merely in order to get them out of her house, this is still a form of coercion that is masked behind religious devotion and prayer.

The next day, Severus and the other Christians who accompany him prepare to return to Jamona. They are convinced at this point that all of the Jews have converted. They are surprised, therefore, when Innocentius' sister-in-law approaches them because they know she has boarded a ship to leave the island when she realizes that Innocentius has converted. In fact, when she boards the ship, there has been no attempt to stop her from leaving. Rather, they encourage her to go because there is no way to convince her to convert.[59] However, she is driven back to shore when she tries to leave. Now she approaches Severus and wraps her arms around his legs like a suppliant begging to convert. Bewildered, he asks her why she wished to abandon her brethren in the first place. She replies that even Jonah wished to flee from the

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54 *Itaque usque in horam ferme tertiam, hymnorum atque orationum proeliis adversus Amalech hostem Iesu ducis nostri sudavit exercitus*. (27.5). "And so up until the third hour our army sweated in battles of hymns and prayers against Amalek, the enemy of our leader, Jesus." This one woman is compared to the leader in Exodus who first attacked the Jews fleeing to Israel from Egypt. That she is the final convert may be seen as a parallel to the distruction of the Amalekites whose name was to be forever expunged from history.

55 Bradbury (1996, p. 121).

56 This is reminiscent of the psychological torment experienced by Judith in the tale of *Judith and Aseneth* before she converts to Judaism.

57 *Et cum in consummatione orationis 'Amen' populus inclamasset, illa credere et se Christianam fieri velle subiunxit.* (27.7).

58 Indeed, such divinely inspired violence after prayer is not unique to the *Letter*. See, for example *3 Maccabees*. An important part of the discourse here is that the violence is inspired by God and not simply the earthly agents.

59 *navem ascendit, non solum permittentibus verum etiam suadentibus nobis, quia ad fidem Christi nec verbis nec miraculis flecteretur* (26.2).

face of God.[60] She adds that he did however fulfil God's will albeit unwillingly. Thus, she is very much like Jonah herself because she flees from conversion in the beginning but, after unwillingly returning to the island, she then converts and offers her two daughters for conversion as well. This, of course, has been God's intention all along as Severus indicates before he begins recounting the tales of the three women.

After the conversion of these last women, the letter concludes. Severus reports that five hundred and forty Jews join the church during the eight days he describes. He adds that he finds it important to report[61] that so many Christians accompanied him on the thirty mile journey from Jamona to assist in the confrontation with the Jews. Since he does not name anyone in particular for helping him, his goal in reporting this fact cannot be to win favor for anyone. It seems possible then to consider that he wants it noted that he has a force of supporters with him when he makes his attack. The accomplishment of so great a task would not have been possible without a large band of enforcers. This is all the more important when considered with the next segment of the letter in which he describes how the Jews themselves are responsible for tearing down the remains of the synagogue and building a new cathedral on its site. As Bradbury notes,

> In cases of synagogue burning in the late 4th and early 5th cents., the issue of compensation was hotly disputed…The details of Ch. 31 reveal how tough Severus has been in negotiations with Theodorus and the other Jewish notables. Conversion was only part of the bargain.[62]

This reveals that a negotiation in fact must have occurred between them. There were hints of this in the conversation between Theodorus and Reuben but the results here confirm it. Including this information at the end of the letter is a not so subtle reminder to the reader that negotiation should be used to persuade conversion.

In a poetic closure, Severus returns for a moment to some of the imagery he employed at the beginning.

> Illud magis mirum magisque gaudendum est, quod ipsam Iudaicae plebis terram diu inertem, nunc autem recissis incredulitatis vepribus et recepto verbi semine, multiplicem fructum iustitiae germinare conspicimus, ita ut nobis in spe tantorum novalium gaudeamus. (30.1)

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60 *'Et Ionas', inquit, 'propheta a facie Domini fugere voluit, et tamen voluntatem Domini licet invitus implevit.'* (28.5).

61 *Inane autem et supervacuum non reor ut… commemorem* (29.3).

62 Bradbury (1996, p. 130, note 25).

> We must rejoice more for that rather marvelous thing that we see the land itself of the Jewish people, which was inert for a long time but now after the thorns of unbelief have been cut back and the seed of the word has been taken in, it produces a multitude of the fruit of justice. And so let us rejoice in the hope of such cultivated land.

No longer is the countryside inhospitable and bearing poisonous snakes and scorpions. The wolves and foxes are gone. The geography has changed. And in fulfilment, at last, of Theodora's and Severus' dreams, the barren fields which were offered to him have been planted and are producing.

Having brought closure to all of the elements he introduced, he also closes the frame of the narrative with a valediction. He includes a formal ending[63] and the date of the events. He follows this with a polite exhortation for others to imitate his actions.

> Quamobrem si indigni et peccatoris verbum dignanter admittitis, zelum Christi adversum Iudaeos sed pro eorumdem perpetua salute suscipite. Forsitan enim iam illud praedictum ab Apostolo venit tempus, ut plenitudine gentium ingressa omnis Israel salvus fiat. Et fortasse hanc ab extremo terrae scintillam voluit Dominus excitari, ut universus orbis terrarum caritatis flagraret incendio ad exurendam infidelitatis silvam (31.2-4)

> For which reason if you respectfully accept the word of an unworthy sinner, take up the zeal of Christ against the Jews but on account of their eternal salvation. For perhaps the time predicted by the Apostle has come already so that all of Israel with the plentitude of the people having entered will be saved. And perhaps the Lord wants this spark to be ignited from the end of the earth so that the entire world will flare with the fire of love to burn down the forest of disbelief.

There can be no doubt after reading his final lines that this letter is in truth a call for action. Severus, as elsewhere, uses biblical reference to support his argument and suggests that conversion is in accordance with God's will. Although his claim at the beginning of the letter was that he wants to relate the events to avoid concealing Christ's miracles, the ending of the letter does not stop with that. The journey from

63 *Haec Beatitudo vestra…cognoscat* (31.1).

beginning to end has carefully laid out a strategy for forcing conversion on the Jews. The feeling that Severus wants his audience to have at the end of the letter is enthusiasm to go forth and save the Jews, not wonder at the things God has done. The riot which erupted at Uzalis when the letter was read before a Christian congregation[64] is evidence that he was able to achieve his goal.

64 The riot is mentioned in the *Liber de miraculis sancti Stephani protomartyris* by Evodius. (Ginsburg, 1996, p. 210).

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